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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000827

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARPI, S/CT, DS/IP/ITA AND DS/IP/NEA

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TAGS: PTER ASEC PGOV PHUM BA

SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER DISCUSSES PROPOSED REGIONAL CT CENTER, IRAN, DOMESTIC DISTURBANCES WITH AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid told the Ambassador May 7 that his Ministry would prepare a concept paper for the proposed Bahrain-based regional counterterrorism center, which was announced the day before at the GCC Summit in Riyadh. He said the paper would be discussed at the GCC Interior Ministers meeting in Abu Dhabi on May 23. He described recent detonations and attempted detonations of small explosive devices as limited minor incidents, except for one attack on a police car, and he expected several arrests in the coming days. He expressed continuing concerns about Iranian activities in Bahrain, alleging that Iranian Ambassadors were recently tasked with drawing up lists of which Shia in their countries were with the Iranian government and which were not. A crisis management team is being established to deal with emergency situations (presumably a reaction to the recent dhow accident that left more than 50 dead). End summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador met on May 7 with Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa to discuss security-related issues in Bahrain. The Ambassador began by asking about news reports that GCC leaders had agreed the day before to establish a regional counterterrorism center in Bahrain. This came as a surprise to Bahrain, Shaikh Rashid said, as it had not been on the agenda. He first learned of it when the King called him from Riyadh with the news. Bahrain has now been tasked with developing a concept paper for the proposed center, which Shaikh Rashid will present to his GCC counterparts at their May 23 meeting in Abu Dhabi. Noting that the idea of a regional center had been raised and discussed before (presumably referring to the Saudi proposal last year for an international CT center), Shaikh Rashid said that "fortunately we have done our homework" on this issue and that he would be prepared for the Abu Dhabi meeting. He said that the idea is being developed by the GCC, but it will not be limited to GCC countries and could include other key countries in the region such as Jordan. He said that technical support would be needed, but did not think funding would be required if the concept is approved by the GCC's wealthier members. This center is separate from Bahrain's joint counterterrorism center, he added.

¶3. (C) On Iran, Shaikh Rashid expressed continued concern about the nationalistic rhetoric coming out of Tehran and wondered why it seemed that every day President Ahmadinejad was picking a new fight. He said that there was a recent meeting of Iranian Ambassadors during which the Ambassadors

were tasked with drawing up lists of those Shia in their country that were with Iran and those that were not. He alleged that when Iranian NSC Chief Ali Larijani was recently in Bahrain, he mysteriously gave a small "chip" to the number two at the Iranian Embassy, and "we want to know what was on that chip" (presumably implying that it contained a list of certain Shia in Bahrain). He said that Iranian diplomats have become more aggressive in seeking support in the Shia community in Bahrain.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador asked about the sporadic protests that have been occurring in Bahrain in recent weeks, as well as the recent use of small explosive devices, one of which detonated in Adliya, an area popular with the Embassy and expatriate community. The Minister replied that the number of incidents was relatively small, and that the Ministry was monitoring them closely. He downplayed the significance of the small explosive devices, which did not seem to be aimed at doing much more than making news. Of greater concern and danger was the recent attack on a police car patrolling in a Shia village, in which molotov cocktails were thrown into the car. As it turned out, the injured policeman was a long-serving Shia, who could not believe that this had happened to him. Shaikh Rashid said that he has been heartened by the response from the community to these attacks, as people are starting to speak out against the attacks and isolate the perpetrators. He stated that arrests were expected in the coming days as the authorities strengthened their criminal case. Chief of Public Security Gen. Zayani added that the Bahraini police had contacted over 150 commercial establishments following the recent incidents to reiterate the need to immediately notify authorities in the event suspicious items were found on their premises.

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¶5. (C) Shaikh Rashid suggested that there was a link between these recent incidents of violence and Hassan Al-Musheima, founder of the Al-Haq movement, a break-away hard-line Shia group that has opposed participation in this year's elections. Even if he is not involved directly, he stated, the violence seems to go down when he is out of the country and rise up again when he returns. And his son is a leader of a small group that has instigated violent protests, he added.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked about press reporting that the government planned to establish a new crisis management team. Shaikh Rashid stated the idea of establishing a national committee for managing an emergency crisis or emergency situation has been under consideration for some time and involves an effort to improve all elements of the Ministry of Interior. The team would be headed by General Zayani who would report directly to the Minister and it would be activated in the case of an emergency. As part of this initiative, over the last several months police officials from Britain have conducted area assessments and offered recommendations in developing such a response team that have included improved training and operational standards within the Ministry. (Comment: Although the initiative may have been under consideration for some time, the recent dhow accident may have highlighted for Bahrain's leadership the need to improve the country's crisis response capability.)

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